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## Memory Eternal for the Arch-Heresiarch of Rome? The True Orthodox Perspective

**Subdeacon Nektarios, M.A.**

With the passing of Pope Francis Bergoglio, the Arch-Heresiarch of the Roman See, many in the Orthodox world—including laity, clergy, and even the so-called Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the United States, along with the “official” autocephalous jurisdictions—have issued statements concerning the Pope’s death, referring to him as the “Holy Father” and invoking the Orthodox Christian phrase Memory Eternal or May His Memory Be Eternal, a term used exclusively in the Funeral Service for an Orthodox Christian for a layman and exclusively for Orthodox Christians alone.

At the very end of the Funeral for Orthodox Christians the rubrics read, “Then the Bishop (or the First Priest) himself says thrice: May their memory be eternal, O our worthily blessed and memorable brother (sister)” [1] and then called for the choir to sing thrice, “Memory Eternal” [2].

While technically correct in one sense—since Francis was not a clergyman but, in fact, a layman according to the Great Fathers of the Church, such as Saint Basil the Great, who says of those in heresy and schism (such as Francis), “The first separatists had received their ordination from the Fathers, and possessed the spiritual gift by the laying on of their hands. But they who were broken off had become laymen, and, because they are no longer able to confer on others that grace of the Holy Spirit from which they themselves are fallen away, they had no authority either to baptize or to ordain” [3]—nonetheless, Pope Francis was not an Orthodox Christian. He died within the ecclesiological boundaries of the Roman Catholic Church and professed not only the Latin heresies so well known to the Orthodox—such as Papal Supremacy, created grace, purgatory, the use of azymes—but also many others.





Arch-Heresiarch Elpidophoros of GOARCH praying with the Heterodox at Latin Mass on April 22nd, 2025

Pope Francis was a staunch ecumenist and syncretist, not to mention a cultural Marxist, known for public statements such as: “Religions are seen as paths trying to reach God. I will use an analogy: They are like different languages that express the divine, [...] There is only one God, and religions are like languages that try to express ways to approach God. Some Sikh, some Muslim, some Hindu, some Christian” [4]. Of course, for the True Orthodox, this is absolutely heretical and blasphemous—to suggest that pagan, Christ- and Trinity-denying religions are valid paths to God.

Yet despite Francis adhering to and dying in his Papal heresies and preaching the very definition of syncretistic ecumenism and branch theory theology, we now see so-called Orthodox Christians praising him posthumously as though he were a legitimate hierarch of the Church and a preacher of Christian truth.

For example, the Assembly of ‘Canonical’ Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America on their official Facebook page state:

The Assembly of Bishops joins its Catholic partners at USCCB in mourning the passing of Pope Francis, head of the Catholic Church and sovereign of the Vatican City State. Throughout his papacy, Pope Francis was a strong supporter of dialogue toward reconciliation with the Orthodox Church throughout the world.

May his memory be eternal! Requiescat in Pace [5].

Likewise, Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem, a well-known ecumenist, issued a statement in which he referred to Francis as the Holy Father, Bishop of Rome, and even used the phrase Memory Eternal—a term meant solely for Orthodox Christians. In the statement, he wrote in full:

The Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem  
Jerusalem, April 21, 2025

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” (John 11:25)

Dearest brothers and sisters in Christ,

With a heart heavy in sorrow yet anchored in the promise of the Risen Lord, I join the faithful around the world in mourning the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome, who today has returned to the house of the Heavenly Father.

Pope Francis' life was a luminous testament to the Gospel, a tireless witness to Christ's boundless mercy, a steadfast champion for the poor, and a beacon of peace and reconciliation among all peoples. According to the Lord's call: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Matthew 5:9)

Even in frailty and suffering, the late Holy Father revealed the strength of true discipleship, embracing the Cross with humility and hope, teaching that the life of a Christian is one of sacrificial love. His final wishes, for a funeral marked by simplicity and faith, reflect his soul's devotion to the Risen Christ, and to the Church as a humble flock of believers, not as a worldly kingdom.

We entrust his noble soul to the infinite compassion of our Lord, and pray: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your master." (Matthew 25:23)

May the memory of Pope Francis be eternal, and may his spirit of love, justice, and peace continue to inspire many spiritual and secular leaders for generations to come.

Theophilos III  
Patriarch of Jerusalem [6].

Again, herein lies a serious problem: Theophilos is recognizing Francis as a legitimate hierarch of what was once the Roman Patriarchate, referring to him as a Holy Father despite his many professed and practiced Latin, ecumenical, and syncretistic heresies. He even presumes the eternal destination of Francis's soul, stating that he now dwells in the "house of the Heavenly Father"—a claim that is presumptuous even for us as Orthodox Christians to make, let alone for someone who openly taught doctrines contrary to those of Christ and His One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

In a similar letter from Patriarch Kirill of the Moscow Patriarchate to Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Camerlengo of the Roman Catholic Church, he wrote, "grant him eternal memory!" [7] Likewise, in another letter from an "official" jurisdiction—the Orthodox Church of Albania—the Pope is addressed as a legitimate clergyman of the Church, and his passing is marked with the phrase, "Eternal be his memory!" In yet another unsurprising statement, the Arch-Heresiarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, recounts how they prayed together in violation of the apostolic canons. During this ecumenistic moment, Bartholomew even invited the Pope to celebrate the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, saying:

Patriarch Theophilos III with Pope Francis

'We knelt side by side in prayer before the Lord's Tomb,' he recalled, revealing that he had proposed to the Pope that they celebrate together in 2025 the 1,700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicæa. The Pope had enthusiastically responded: "This is an amazing thought, an amazing idea and proposal."

"It was not meant to be for him to come," noted the Ecumenical Patriarch, adding that the Ecumenical Patriarchate will nevertheless honor this historic anniversary in some way, while the Catholic Church's participation will depend on the stance and intentions of the newly elected Pope.

Concluding, His All-Holiness offered prayers for the repose of Pope Francis' soul and expressed hope for a worthy successor who will continue his precious work: "Eternal be your memory, Brother Pope Francis." [8].

The list of World Orthodox hierarchs referring to Pope Francis as a "Holy Father," a legitimate Bishop of Rome, a "Brother in Christ," or even a "Holy Man" seems to go on endlessly. These World Orthodox bishops appear to see themselves more as Foreign Service diplomats, issuing a stream of platitudes and praises for Pope Francis, despite his overt rejection of the truths of Holy Orthodoxy.

"Statement of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the passing of the Pope"

Are we, as True Orthodox Christians, called to celebrate his death, condemn the Pope to hell, pop champagne bottles, and presume to take the place of God's judgment for his heresies? No—we will leave that to God, for we know that it is not our place.

However, with that being said, are we, as Orthodox Christians, called to ignore the undeniable reality that Pope Francis was the Arch-Heresiarch of the fallen and former Roman Patriarchate—a practitioner of heretical ecumenism and a preacher of syncretistic branch theory? Absolutely not. We are called to confess the True Faith of Holy Orthodoxy without compromise.

And how much more should this responsibility weigh upon the supposed Orthodox hierarchs—those charged with rightly dividing the Word of Truth?

Because the jurisdictions of World Orthodoxy and their hierarchs have ceased to act as true bishops—and now function more like foreign service diplomats in cassocks, globe-trotting and playing politics—they seem to have forgotten their place as shepherds of the flock and teachers of the faithful. Were this not the case, the laity would understand that we do not serve funerals, offer *panikhidas*, or chant Memory Eternal for those who are outside the ecclesiological boundaries of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

"Bartholomew and Pope Francis Pray Together at Holy Sepulcher" Official EP YouTube Channel

However, that being said, in the Holy Trinity Monastery (Jordanville) publication entitled *Orthodox Life* (1978) it contains a synodal statement originally published by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) in 1932 concerning the burial of the heterodox. This statement outlines the proper Orthodox response to the death of those outside the Church: one that upholds Christian empathy while remaining steadfast and uncompromising in the confession of our Faith.

### **The Decision of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad**

On August 20/September 2, 1932, the Synod of Bishops reached a decision on the question concerning burial services for the heterodox and, since it is insufficiently well known that it is forbidden to serve burial services for the heterodox or to have *panikhidas* sung for them, it has been decided to publish the following explanatory proclamation encyclically, by means of a declaration addressed to the eminent hierarchs, clergy and all the children of the Russian Church Abroad.

Preserving the purity of her Orthodox teaching and the entire divinely established order of her life, the Church from time immemorial has forbidden her bishops, clergy and laymen alike from entering into communion in prayer, whether in church or at home, with all heretics, renegades (schismatics) and those who have been excommunicated from Church society (Apostolic Canons X, XI, XLV, Synod of Laodicea, Canon XXXIII [9]). The strictness with which the Church protects her children from the danger of infection by any heresy has extended even to prohibiting priests to pray or to perform any sacramental action in the mere presence of heretics, with the exception only of those cases when the latter "promise to repent and abandon their heresy" (St. Timothy of Alexandria, Canon IX [10]). At the basis of these canonical decrees lies the eternal word of Christ: "But if he (thy brother) neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee an heathen man and a publican" (Matt 18:17).

Being outside the Church during their lifetime, heretics and schismatics stand yet further apart from her after death, for then the very possibility of repentance and of turning to the light of Truth is closed to them. It is quite natural, therefore, that the Church cannot offer up for them the propitiatory Bloodless Sacrifice or, in general, any purifying prayer at all. The latter is clearly forbidden by the words of the apostle (cf. I Jn 5:16). Following the ordinances of the apostles and the fathers, the Church prays only for the repose of Orthodox Christians who have died in faith and repentance, as living organic members of the Body of Christ. There may also be included those who had fallen away but later repented and united themselves to the Church once more (St. Peter the Martyr, Canon III [11]). Without that final condition, they remain alien to the Church and, as members who have fallen away from her, are deprived of the latter's nourishing sap, i.e., the grace-bearing mysteries and prayers of the Church.

Faithful to the whole spirit of the ancient, universal Church, our Russian Orthodox Church customarily forbade not only burial services, according to the Orthodox ritual, for the heterodox (i.e., Roman Catholics, Protestants, Armenians, etc.), but even the serving of *panikhidas* for them. Out of a sense of Christian mercy, she began to tolerate a single condescension in regard to them: if a heterodox person of another "Christian confession" dies and there is no priest or pastor of his confession to perform the funeral, the Church permits the Orthodox priest, vested in *epitrachilion* and *phelonion*, to accompany the body of the departed from its place to the cemetery, and to lower it into the grave as the hymn "Holy God..." is sung. The decrees of the Holy Synod, which gave legal force to this rule (the first of which is dated July 20, 1727), permit neither the carrying of the body of the deceased into an Orthodox Church, **nor the singing of a requiem *litia* or even of "Eternal Memory" for him** (cf. the decrees of the Holy Synod dated May 22, 1730, August 24, 1797, and February 20, 1880).

Regrettably, our ecclesiastical practice has not been consistent and uniform in the given case. Under the influence of the liberal trends of public opinion, and sometimes to placate the civil authorities, the Synod began to permit at times the serving of *panikhidas* for Roman Catholics and Protestants, to the great scandal of the people of the Church, whose conscience could not be reconciled with so clear-cut a departure from the ancient tradition of the fathers.

This grievous practice, which took root gradually over a period of time, was later carried abroad by Russian refugees and began to be widely disseminated, especially in the Western European parishes that acknowledged Metropolitan Evlogy as their head [12]. It being his custom, in general, to follow after his flock rather than to lead, the latter himself widely encouraged this anti-canonical practice. It is known that, on his orders, *panikhidas* were served in all the Churches that acknowledged him for Doumer, President of the French Republic, who had been assassinated by Gorgulov. It should be understood why a public display of prayer for a non-Orthodox person was necessary. The Catholics could not attach to it its true meaning; to them it was merely the prayer of "schismatics"; and it could not have been the sincere desire of the Russian Orthodox people to pray for a man with whom they had not the least ecclesiastical ties. Is it not clear that this was simple a manifestation of Russian feeling in regard to the honored president who had perished at the hand of a Russian criminal? But were there no other means of expressing sympathy for France and of censuring the guilty Gorgulov besides the Church's services for the dead? Does it not lower the dignity of the Church in the eyes of the heterodox themselves when she is made the instrument of purely political aims? With the aim of subverting the Russian refugees, the Catholics do not cease repeating to them that there is no essential difference between the teaching of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, and that the division which exists between them is based substantially on misunderstandings. The serving of solemn *panikhidas* for Catholics can only heighten the confusion in the minds of the Russian Orthodox people, strengthening them in the erroneous belief which Roman propaganda strives to foster in them. Even less can they justify having a *panikhida* served for deceased Protestants, for Lutherans do not ascribe any power at all to the Church's prayerful intercession for the dead.

The breadth of Orthodox Christian love — in the name of which, ostensibly, the Church's prayers should be permitted for departed Christian, regardless of which confession they belonged to — cannot be extended to include a disregard for the Orthodox teaching of the faith, the deposit of which our Church has preserved within herself throughout the course of centuries, for then every boundary separating the One, True Church of salvation from those that were torn from grace bearing union with her would be blotted out. The limits of condescension permitted by reason of ecclesiastical *œconomia* in regard to those who have fallen away are precisely defined in the holy canons, and no one has the right to extend the boundaries fixed by the holy and divinely-wise fathers.

In order to put an end to the scandal which has arisen in the Church over the ecclesiastical commemoration of the heterodox and over the serving of *panikhidas* for them in particular, the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad has considered it necessary once more to remind both the pastors and the Russian Orthodox flock abroad of the intolerability of any departure from the ancient canonical order apart from those provided for in the above mentioned decrees of the Holy Synod. The flock must not exert pressure of any kind on the conscience of priestly celebrants who are obliged to maintain faithfulness to the ancient, canonical order and to hold high the standard of Holy Orthodoxy before the face of both the other Eastern Churches and all the heterodox as well.

In the event of the threat of serious conflicts with his parishioners over this issue, the priest must forthwith refer the matter for decision to his diocesan bishop, whose duty it is to show them authoritative support in the battle for the preservation of the ancient patristic statutes of the Church [13].

### Conclusion

With these things in mind, we should take careful note of what is proper and truly Orthodox, rather than simply going along with the crowd in what may appear to be a kind gesture, often made in an attempt to virtue signal. We can respond appropriately to the repose of those outside the Church with Christian empathy, without compromising our Orthodoxy or falling into the delusion of the masses—calling evil good and good evil, or, in this case, calling what is heterodox Orthodox, and what is truly Orthodox heterodox.

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- [3]. Saint Basil the Great, "Letter CLXXXVIII," in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody: Hendrickson Publications, 1999), 224.
- [4]. "Pope Francis concludes apostolic journey with elderly and youth of Singapore," The Catholic World Report, accessed April 22nd, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240914013636/https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2024/09/13/pope-francis-concludes-apostolic-journey-with-elderly-and-youth-of-singapore/>

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[9]. Rudder, pp. 22-23; 67; 566. N.B." The canons of the Synod of Laodicea received ecumenical authority through the Sixth Ecumenical Council's Canon II (cf. Rudder, pp. 294-296).

[10]. Rudder, pp. 894-895. N.B.: The canons of St. Timothy received ecumenical authority through Canon II of the Sixth Ecumenical Council. St. Timothy was Patriarch of Alexandria in the fourth century and was one of the bishops who participated in the Second Ecumenical Council, which was convoked in Constantinople in 381 to condemn the heresies of Macedonius and others. St. Timothy reposed in 389.

[11]. Rudder, pp. 741-742. St. Peter the Martyr was Patriarch of Alexandria and was martyred during the persecution of Diocletian about the year 305. His canons received ecumenical authority through Canon II of the Sixth Ecumenical Council.

[12]. For a thorough discussion of the part played by Metropolitan Evlogy in the ecclesiastical situation of the Russian Church of the diaspora, see *The Truth about the Russian Church Abroad*, M. Rodzianko (Jordanville: St. Job of Pochaev Press 1975), and *History of the Russian Church Abroad: 1917-1971*, prepared by Holy transfiguration Monastery (Seattle: St. Nectarios Press, 1972.) The former work is readily available from the bookstore of Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N.Y. 13361 or from SJKP; the latter work is presently out of print.

[13]. "Burial of Heterodox: The Decision of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad," *Orthodox Life* 28, no. 1 (1978): 28-31.